

IGNAZIO SAVERIO MIFSUD

1722-1773

COMMEMORATION

BY

THE MALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1997

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Published by
The Malta Historical Society

Edited and produced by
William Zammit

Printed at Veritas Press

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SIGLA

AIM	Archive of the Inquisition of Malta
AOM	Archive of the Order of Malta
ASV	<i>Archivio Segreto Vaticano</i>
Lib. Ms.	Library Manuscript
NLM	National Library of Malta
UML	University of Malta Library

BIBLIOTECA

MALTESE

DELL'AVVOCATO MIFSUD

PARTE PRIMA,

Che contiene l'Istoria Cronologica, e le
notizie della Persona, e delle Opere
degli Scrittori nati in Malta, e Gozo
fino all'anno 1650.



CONSECRATA

ALL'EMINENTISSIMO, e REVERENDISSIMO PRINCIPE
IL SIGNOR CARDINALE

CARLO

REZZONICO

Camerlengo di Santa Chiesa,
Secretario de' Memoriali,
e Nipote della Santità
di Nostro Signore

CLEMENTE PP. XIII.

Felicemente Regnante.

In Malta nel Palazzo, e Stamperia di S. A. S. 1764.
Per D. Niccolò Capaci suo Stampatore,) (Con Lic. de' Sup.

*Per il Marchese Don Gregorio Augusto D'Arzuffara Ajjiach, March. d. San.
Vincenzo D'Arzuffara, Cavaliere del S. S. D. D. Romano, e Messinese, e
Conti Sant, e de Conti del S. R. I. D'Arzuffara della Famiglia D'Arzuffara
fornita, e possedere della D'Arzuffara della medesima Famiglia.*

IGNAZIO SAVERIO MIFSUD

1722-1773

Commemorative Lecture delivered by William Zammit before the Malta Historical Society at the National Library of Malta, Valletta, on Monday, 15th December 1997.

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel that I must introduce this lecture by thanking the Malta Historical Society for the honour granted to me of talking about one of Malta's most deserving past historians who, notwithstanding his considerable achievements and the fact that his manuscript collection is amongst the most utilised, has received relatively limited attention.

INTRODUCTION

Ignazio Saverio Mifsud (1722-1773), together with Count Giovanni Antonio Ciantar (1696-1778)¹ and Giovanni Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis (1712-1770)² formed the nucleus of Maltese *letterati* active in Malta during the mid to late eighteenth century. Other personalities including, amongst others, Gaetano Reboul, Bartolomeo Mifsud better known as Padre Pelagio, Giuseppe Giacomo Testaferrata, Francesco Maria Torrigiani and Giovanni Nicolò Muscat pertained to this quite remarkable group, producing an extensive corpus of published and manuscript literature, much of which still awaits in-depth analysis as to its significance to the contemporary audience.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mifsud's own manuscript collection constitutes by far the major source of biographical information regarding him. Such a source has, in fact, been utilised by practically all of his biographers.³

¹ On Giovanni Antonio Ciantar see *Malta Illustrata*, Vol. II (1780), pp. 593-602 ; Giovanni Mangion, "Giovanni Antonio Ciantar letterato maltese del Settecento", *Melita Historica*, Vol. VII, no. 2 (1977), pp. 157-162 , William Zammit, "A bibliography of Giovanni Antonio Ciantar's printed works", *Melita Historica*, Vol. XI, no. 3 (1994), pp. 281-309.

² On de Soldanis see Josepn Cassar Pullicino, *Gio. Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis 1712-1770 : commemoration by the Malta Historical Society 1996* (Malta, 1996).

³ For published and other biographies of Mifsud see the bibliography section below.

Mifsud was born in 1722, or possibly late 1721, the son of Giuseppe and Eugenia née Chircop.⁴ Between 1730 and 1735 he attended the *ginnasio*, being taught grammar by his godfather Don Michele Frendo.⁵ He proceeded with his studies of theology and jurisprudence at Rome, under the direction of Professor Domenico Spinelli.⁶ The fact that Mifsud was lame in one foot created problems for his admission to Holy Orders. However, a commission made up of four Jesuits : the renowned Pietro Francesco Rosignoli, later founder of the *Casa degli Esercizi* at Floriania, Ignazio Teuma, consultant and censor of the Maltese Inquisitorial Tribunal and author of a treatise on the Bull of the Crusade, Vincenzo Orso and Giuseppe Maria Giambra decided the case in his favour and, on 6 February 1735, Mifsud received the tonsure privately at the Bishop's Palace.⁷ On 17 March 1736 he received the four Minor Orders at the Church of the Minor Observants at Valletta and on 20 November 1740, Mifsud became a member of the French Congregation erected under the title of the purification of the Virgin Mary at the Jesuits' Church in Valletta.⁸

Between 1 January 1740 and 15 June 1741, Mifsud kept his earliest known *giornale* recording, often in minute detail, contemporary occurrences as well as personal observations and reminiscences from the past.⁹ On 26 April 1746 Mifsud again proceeded to Rome, this time to be ordained to the priesthood and to graduate in jurisprudence.¹⁰ Both Mifsud and his companion Gaetano Grima kept separate diaries of their Roman sojourn.¹¹ Later in the same year he was appointed *protonotario apostolico*, Count Palatine and Knight of the Golden Spur.¹²

⁴ The possibility of Mifsud's birth occurring in late 1721 has been pointed out by Stephen Zammit in his M.A. (Italian) thesis, *Il giornale maltese di Ignazio Saverio Mifsud* (University of Malta, June 1996), p. 3, quoting a letter in NLM Misc. 250, sent by Mifsud to his uncle, dated 9 November 1756.

⁵ NLM Lib. Ms. 9, p. 437.

⁶ Robert Mifsud Bonnici, *Dizzjunarju bijo-biblijografiku nazzjonali* (Malta, 1960), p. 347.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ S. Zammit (1996), p. 4.

⁹ NLM Lib. Ms. 9, pp. 160-488, entitled *Annali overo casi occorsi giornalmente incominciati dal 1° gennaio nell'anno di nostra salute 1740 notate dal chierico Ignazio Saverio Mifsud maltese nell'inclita Isola di Malta 1740*.

¹⁰ S. Zammit (1996), p. 4, quoting Gaetano Reboul's published *giornale*.

¹¹ NLM Lib. Ms. 1, pp. 338-455, entitled *Relazione e distinto ragguaglio del viaggio fatto da me D. Ignazio Saverio Mifsud assieme col Signor Abbate Gaetano Grima per l'Alma Città di Roma intrapreso da Malta li 26 aprile dell'anno 1746*, covering the period down to 4 June 1746 ; NLM Lib. Ms. 1062, partly consisting of the untitled diary of Gaetano Grima, covering the period 26 April to 15 May 1746. Grima resumed his diary for the period 26 June to 12 July 1747.

¹² S. Zammit (1996), p. 5 ; NLM Lib. Ms. 607, consisting of the original Bull creating Mifsud *protonotario apostolico* ; NLM Misc. 245, item 16.

Emil B. Smith

Il Reverendo Ignazio L. S. Nipote Ord. S. dell. E. E. W. pio: argona: v. f. e. m.
 egli ha l'ordine di Confessione nel (tribunale) del v. Offizio nell. J. o. l. d. di
 Malton; l'ordine supposto l. E. E. W. di concederle in amplissimo forma la fa-
 cilità di legere, e p. r. e. n. e. d. e. q. u. e. l. l. i. v. o. g. l. i. a. n. o. L. i. b. r. i. p. r. i. m. i. t. e. o. l. o. g. i. c. i. J. o. u. r. n. a. l. i. e. d.
 anche tutti quelli altri, che possono esser necessarii & l'una d. t. o. n. d. e. f. e. r. r. e.
 se si impiegar. e anche & nel maggior numero. Ch. f.

Mifsud's connection with the Maltese Inquisitorial Tribunal started during the 1750s. As was the case with a number of other prominent Maltese personalities, including Count Ciantar, Mifsud obtained the much coveted status of inquisitorial patentee. Following the death of Saverio Polidano, one of the Inquisition's consultants, Mifsud was appointed to that office on 18 August 1756.¹³ Such a position not only bestowed prestige upon its holder, but also exempted the latter from being subject to the government of the Order of St. John with all the advantages such an exemption brought with it. Mifsud is known to have resumed with his *giornale maltese* between 1 January 1753 and 25 December 1765, and his three published works were printed in Malta between 1757 and 1767.¹⁴

Suffering from declining health since late 1765, Mifsud died sometime before 28 June 1773 since, on that date, Inquisitor Lante informed the Congregation of the Holy Office of his death and of the need to appoint a successor.¹⁵ Mifsud was buried in the Chapel of Our Lady of Liberty at the Capuchin Friary of Floriana. The chapel, together with Mifsud's inlaid marble tombstone, were destroyed by enemy bombardment during World War II.¹⁶

ERUDITE INTERESTS

Besides his formal education, culminating in his graduating in both civil and canon law, Mifsud, from an early age manifested a broad cultural interest. In 1743, being about twenty-one years old, Mifsud founded the *Accademia dei Fervidi*. The establishment of this literary society, the earliest of its type known in the Maltese Islands, was undoubtedly inspired by similar ones on the Continent, particularly those in Italy, with which Mifsud was well familiar. With the hindsight of its short span of activity, Mifsud later ascribed his foundation of the *Accademia* to his youthful enthusiasm.¹⁷ Members of the *Accademia* used to meet on Wednesday evenings, reciting their literary compositions of varying quality. A considerable number of these works have survived and - irrespective of their literary merit - they provide a fundamentally important source regarding literary

¹³ AIM *Registrum Litterarum Patentium*, 1739-1792, f. 67v.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the significance of Mifsud's manuscript and printed material see below.

¹⁵ AIM *Corrispondenza*, Vol. 33, f. 117.

¹⁶ Angelo Mizzi, OFM Cap., *L'apostolato maltese nei secoli passati*, Vol. 1 (Malta, 1937), p. 12 reproducing Mifsud's epitaph, plate following page 56, showing interior of chapel, with Mifsud's tombstone clearly visible; P. Timotju, OFM Cap., *Il-knisja u l-kunvent tal-Kappuccini tal-Furjana u l-Ordni Gerosolimitan ta' Malta* (Malta, 1955), pp. 25-28. The eighteenth-century burial records of the Capuchin Order are not known to have survived, personal communication by Francis Azzopardi, OFM Cap.

¹⁷ NLM Lib. Ms. 1, p. 203, "... nell'Accademia, che col titolo di Fervida fu introdotta in Malta nel 1743 fatica del furor giovanile del Dr. Ignazio Saverio Mifsud".

Alto Ill. e Alto Rendo Sig. come Fello: = Dalla Lettera
di Vo. in data del 18. Giugno scorso ha intesa que-
sta l. Congre. la morte dell' Avvocato D. Ignazio La-
verio Alfisud già Consultore di Eodesto l. Offizio, ne' vo-
le, che si sostituisca altro Consultore in suo luogo secon-
do il Decreto emanato l. 4. Marzo 1861. Dei meriti
dell' Avvocato Rimbattista Patti il quale avrebbe desi-
derato di conseguire una tal Carica, si avrà ragione in
caso di altra vacanza; E le auguro felicità

Di Vo.

Roma 31. Luglio 1863.

Come Fello
G. Lamberti

Alto Ill. Ingre di / allalta/

activity in mid eighteenth-century Malta.¹⁸ As was customary, members of the *Accademia* took on a pseudonym, with Mifsud's being that of *accademico fertile*. Eighteen sessions are known to have been held between the inaugural one of 19 June 1743 and that of 15 July 1744, after which the *Accademia* disbanded as a result of unspecified disagreements between its members.¹⁹

Over the years, and partially as a result of his travels, Mifsud established contacts with Maltese and foreign cultured personalities. His travels to Italy certainly contributed in no small way towards his intellectual formation. Such travel, undertaken by many contemporary Maltese *letterati*, constituted the local equivalent of their European counterpart's Grand Tour, stimulating intellectual interests and widening horizons. This was all the more required in the local case, given Malta's still relative insularity during the mid eighteenth century, where cultural institutions as museums, libraries and even printing presses were limited or indeed non-existent, and where, moreover, the circle of intellectuals was necessarily extremely restricted. While abroad Maltese *letterati* usually maintained a correspondence with their colleagues on the Island. Writing to the noted diarist Giuseppe Agius, on 9 January 1753, Gaetano Reboul refers to the fact that Giuseppe's brother, Canon Agius de Soldanis, who was residing in Rome had, on 7 March 1752, sent him information about Malta. Reboul took the occasion of emphasising with de Soldanis' brother the necessity of conserving the original writings of Maltese *letterati* for posterity.²⁰

As in the case of Ciantar and de Soldanis, Mifsud was a member of foreign academies, notably of the *Accademia botanica e di storia naturale* of Cortona and the *Accademia degli Apatisti* of Florence. Aware of their particular difficulties and limitations given the local cultural isolation, a spirit of mutual cooperation may be discerned between eighteenth-century Maltese *letterati*. Indeed various examples of such cooperation have been recorded. Thus, for instance, on 30 June 1752, Mifsud provided Gaetano Reboul with a publication of Felice Demarco for the Ricasoli chapel library, with Reboul in turn passing on to Mifsud information regarding the sixteenth-century Maltese prelate Leonardo Abel, to be utilised in the compilation of Mifsud's *Biblioteca maltese*, with which Reboul was familiar.²¹ Mifsud, on various occasions, benefitted from similar passing on of information

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-315, containing a record of the sessions held, and a collection of literary material presented during them.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203, "*Dopo un anno di continuo esercizio non senza profitto, e concorso de letterati che si adunavano ogni mercoledì, fu poi per disgusti insorti tralasciata l'Accademia*".

²⁰ NLM Lib. Ms. 1029, unfol., G. Reboul, *Le Dodici Lettere Maltesi*, Reboul to Agius, dated 9 January 1753.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Reboul to Mifsud, dated 30 June 1752.

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ECCLESIASTICÆ

MELITENSIS

HISTORIÆ FRAGMENTUM

Sacram Chronologicam seriem continens

• DIGNITATUM, & CANONICORUM

Trium Insignium

COLLEGIATARUM,

Q U Æ

*In Melitæ, & Gaulos Insulis
Sanctæ Apostolicæ Sedis beneficentia
Erebtæ,
Maximo Divini Nominis incremento
existunt.*

Additis Inscriptionibus, ac Epitaphiis
in iisdem Ecclesiis
inseulptis,

from other Maltese *letterati* who, appreciative of his awesome undertaking, provided him with snippets of bio-bibliographical data about local authors.

Foremost among Mifsud's cultural inclinations was a lifelong passion for books, and it could hardly be otherwise that his *opus magnum* took the form of a bibliography. His diaries abound with references to book buying from sales and auctions, particularly of libraries belonging to deceased persons. On 15 April 1760 Mifsud bought *alcuni libri sopra Malta, e sopra la Sagra Religione*, giving their titles and cost.²² Similarly, the sales of books formerly belonging to lawyer Scerri, *uditore* Fabrizio Grech and *uditore* Raffaele Callus, in 1760, 1761 and 1764 respectively, provided Mifsud the opportunity to purchase a considerable amount of material, particularly works of a legal nature.²³ A miscellaneous collection of material, totalling well over a hundred works was, in December 1761, bought from the renowned Dr. Locano, whose wife was a sister of lawyer Scerri.²⁴ In November 1765, sickness did not prevent Mifsud from purchasing material from Count Bologna's collection.²⁵

The information available upon the acquisition of books, both from Mifsud as well as from other sources, indicates that a flourishing second-hand book market existed during the second half of the eighteenth century. Books seem to have predominantly reached the Island through their importation by individual Maltese or members of the Order for their private use, rather than by professional book dealers who seem to have been a rare breed. Books were moreover imported by locally established *rigettieri* who regularly travelled abroad to buy and import a variety of goods locally in demand.²⁶ A further source consisted of the importation of entire collections belonging to deceased members of the Order living on the Continent. The Order's statutes stipulated that such books as belonging to deceased members whether living in Malta or abroad were to pass on to the library of the Conventual Chaplains and, later, to the *Biblioteca Publica*. Duplicate material or other which for any reason was deemed unsuitable for the Order's collection was however sold off locally, with such sales often being highly attended. Interest in the acquisition of rare *melitensia* already existed and over-enthusiastic collectors did at times suffer disillusionment. A contemporary anecdote recalled how one such collector, going through a book sale, caught a glimpse of a title-page bearing the phrase *Malte orologium*. Believing to have come across a rare and highly prized work, the collector hastily went home to get

²² NLM Lib. Ms. 13, p. 269.

²³ NLM Lib. Ms. 13, p. 300, 15.7.1760 ; p. 593, 21.7.1761 and 14, p. 217, 4.1.1764.

²⁴ NLM Lib. Ms. 13, pp. 695-698, 30.12.1761.

²⁵ NLM Lib. Ms. 14, p. 519.

²⁶ ASV *Segreteria di Stato : Malta*, Vol. 146, f. 200r-v, Inquisitor Gallarati Scotti - Segreteria di Stato, 13.11.1790.

the money to buy the work. Upon returning however he discovered to his dismay that he had misread the title-page, which actually stated *Martyrologium*.²⁷

The establishment of the Order's printing press on the Island in 1756 made good for the serious difficulties suffered by the Maltese when it came to publishing their works. These difficulties were commented upon by Mifsud in his *Biblioteca maltese*, where he also eulogised Pinto for his decision to set up the press. Within a few years of its establishment the press, following contemporary practice, started to publish an assortment of material which was then sold by the press itself. The most notable example of this practice was the publishing and marketing of Ciantar's monumental *Malta illustrata*, published in two volumes in 1772 and 1780.²⁸

Mifsud took a great interest in the press, visiting the premises regularly and building a cordial relation with its staff, particularly with the master printer Niccolò Capaci. His diaries provide a constant stream of information - often otherwise unavailable - upon the early functioning of the press. Thus on 12 May 1757 he records the arrival of the three sets of majuscule capital fonts for the press.²⁹ Moreover Mifsud made it a point to acquire, through donation or purchase, as many of the locally printed works as possible. This he managed either via his contacts with the authors or else through acquisition from the press itself. The latter method is known to have taken place down to 1765. Mifsud's largest acquisition of this nature was made at the end of 1761 when pressman Giuseppe d'Angelo delivered to Mifsud no less than thirty-one works which had been printed during that year.³⁰ Mifsud's cordial relations with the printer Capaci was, in 1767, to receive a severe blow as a result of the dispute concerning the printing of *Biblioteca maltese*.³¹

Besides having the satisfaction of witnessing the establishment of a local printing press, Mifsud was similarly to witness the setting up of the *Biblioteca Tanseana*, with the amalgamation of the former Conventual Chaplains Library

²⁷ ASV *Segreteria di Stato* : Malta, Vol. 144, f. 191, Inquisitor Gallarati Scotti - Segreteria di Stato, 3.5.1788.

²⁸ On the Maltese eighteenth-century press' publishing role, see William Zammit, *Printing and its cultural role in Malta during the rule of the Order of St. John*, M.A. (History) thesis, University of Malta, 1996, especially pp. 229-249.

²⁹ NLM Lib. Ms. 12, p. 197, 12.5.1757, "nella Stamperia Magistrale giunsero li caratteri maiuscoli, che non vi erano".

³⁰ NLM Lib. Ms. 13, pp. 699-701, 30.12.1761.

³¹ On this dispute see below.

IN OCCASIONE, CHE NELLA VEN. CHIESA DI S. LUCIA, E NELLA
CAPPELLA IVI DEDICATA A S. PASQUALE BAJLON SOTTO IL DI' 17. MAGGIO 1770.
SI SOLLENNIZZA CON POMPA LA FESTIVITA' DEL MEDESIMO SANTO

Dall'Avvocato Don Saverio Mifsud ultimamente investito
del Giurisdiconato di detta Cappella

S O N E T T O

Quest' Ara, sù cui un Serafin rapito
L'eucaristico Pan fembra, che adori
Con dritto pio d'annui perenni Onori
Un Divoto a BAJLON ha stabilito.

Di tali offeqj se finor smarrito
Giacque il fervor, ecco del dì gli albori
Che gloriosi più al Santo i suoi splendori
Con pompa rende, e col folle rito,

Oh di fregi più rari Eroe ben degno
Chi dir potrà se memorabil giorno
Più questo, o quello fu del pio disegno

Tal sia sempre festoso il suo ritorno;
Ma questo dì resti distinto al segno
De' sommi auspici, onde si scorge adorno.



with de Tencin's and Portocarrero's collections. As in the case of the press, Mifsud took an active interest in the novel institution, closely following its development.³²

Mifsud was also well familiar with the important private libraries existing on the Island. He was for instance well acquainted with Gaetano Reboul's collection. On the latter's death in April 1759, Mifsud records that Reboul's library comprised a substantial collection of manuscripts with a bearing on Maltese history.³³ In October of the same year, Mifsud visited de Soldanis' library and collection of antiquities.³⁴ A month later he paid a visit to Carlo Antonio Barbaro's splendid museum and library.³⁵ Such familiarisation enabled him to include a description of contemporary Maltese libraries in *Biblioteca maltese*.

By the time of his death Mifsud had built up his own impressive library of printed books and manuscripts. The extent of his collection may be gleaned through references to it in his diaries as well as in *Biblioteca maltese*, since he often indicates in the latter whether or not he possessed a work being described. His collection has, at least in part, survived with material being held at the National and University libraries. Indeed, apart from the *stromata* collection itself, some of the rarest works of *melitensia* possessed by the National Library formerly belonged to Mifsud. These are mostly to be found within the National Library's *miscellanea* collection, in volumes which originally also formed part of Mifsud's *stromata*. The National Library's copy of the earliest traced locally printed work, Geronimo Marulli's *I Natali delle religiose militie...* (Malta, 1643) had belonged to Mifsud.

PUBLISHED WORKS

Three works of a varying nature were published by Mifsud, all of which were printed locally between 1757 and 1767.³⁶ The first work consisted of a listing of Maltese and Gozitan canonries and of their holders between 1623 and 1757. The

³² Eg. NLM Lib. Ms. 14, pp. 156-157, 11.8.1763, "*Il Canonico Agius, Bibliotecario, stava applicato in far l'Indice faucosissimo alfabetico, si de' nomi e cognomi dell'autori, che delle materie*".

³³ NLM Lib. Ms. 13, p. 71, 10.4.1759, "... *sua Biblioteca, ove si trovano non poche manoscritti, con moltissime notizie istoriche Maltesi*".

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166, 6.10.1759, "*Nel dopo pranzo fu a fare una visita al Signor Canonico Agius, ove vidde la bella libreria fornita con libri di belle lettere e l'museo maltese con diverse rarità di anticaglia*".

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200, 23.11.1759, "... *viddero superficialmente la libreria composta di vari libri di belle lettere e varia erudizione in ogni genere, e specialmente di certe manoscritti rari, e di pregio, tra quali alcuni originali*".

³⁶ For a detailed bibliographical description of these works see the bibliography section below.

list of Gozitan canonries was printed in January 1757.³⁷ In March of the same year Mifsud commissioned the printing of a continuation of this work, covering the canonries of Birkirkara and Valletta. Though separately commissioned, the two works were amalgamated and published as one volume, with the title *Ecclesiasticæ Melitensis Historiæ Fragmentum...* (Malta, 1757).³⁸

Later in 1757 Mifsud had his second work published. This consisted of a ten-page account of the unusually strong storms which had battered the Maltese Islands on 29 October and on 5 November of that year. A few days after the events the printer Capaci had asked Mifsud for an account of what had occurred for it to be printed.³⁹ The work, entitled *Ragguaglio degli spaventevoli accidenti occorsi in quest'Isola di Malta li 29 ottobre e 5 novembre MDCCLVII...* (Malta, 1757) was printed by the end of November.⁴⁰ It appeared under anonymous authorship, and it is only through Mifsud's diaries that the work may be ascribed to him. This account provoked a curious incident which sheds light upon the censorship procedure adopted by the Order's press.⁴¹ In December, Corogna, a Maltese conventual chaplain, composed a satiric version of Mifsud's original account. Corogna's version was submitted for printing, but was withheld by the censors. On 5 January 1758 a second satiric version was presented for printing, this time by an unnamed knight. This work was again refused printing. One of the censors wrote to Capaci, warning him that such a work went against public morality, a judgement which Mifsud interpreted as being evidence of the diligence adopted by the press censors.⁴² When Mifsud came to know that the work was directed against his own account, he asked Capaci to hand him the censored satire with the author's name so that he could retort. Capaci, however, sent Mifsud a copy of only two quatrains from the satire, together with another two - composed by the printer himself - ridiculing the author of the satire identified as being knight Trento.⁴³

Mifsud's *Biblioteca maltese* stands out as one of the monumental publications of eighteenth-century Maltese authors, rivalled only by Giovanni Antonio Ciantar's *Malta illustrata*. It was moreover the most substantial privately commissioned printing undertaking of the Order's press, taking three years to print and costing its author over five hundred scudi.⁴⁴

³⁷ AOM 2068, f. 9, item no. 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 11, item no. 23.

³⁹ NLM Lib. Ms. 12, pp. 273-274, 278, 282.

⁴⁰ AOM 2068, f. 17v, item no. 64.

⁴¹ NLM Lib. Ms. 12, pp. 306-308.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 307 "... per scorgere con quanta diligenza si censura quello che in questa Magistrale Stamperia si stampa".

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 308, quatrains reproduced in William Zammit (1996), pp. 105-106.

⁴⁴ AOM 2048, f. 8, item no. 37.

RAGGUAGLIO

DEGLI

SPAVENTEVOLI ACCIDENTI

OCcorsi IN QUEST' ISOLA DE

MALTA

Li 29. Ottobre, e 5. Novembre MDCCLVII.

Minutamente descritti, e dati a luce con le dovute osservazioni
proposte a Signori Filosofi, ed Eruditissimi Naturalisti,
per scrutinarne di esse la vera causa.



In Malta, nel Palazzo, e Stamperia di S. A. S. MDCCLVII.
Per D. Niccolò Capaci suo Stampatore.)C Con Licenza de' Superiori.

Mifsud's project consisted essentially of a bio-bibliographical description of Maltese authors and of others in any way related to Malta. Thus for instance Bishops of Malta, even though foreigners, were included if they could be considered as being authors. Biographical information about seventy-two authors was compiled with a descriptive listing of their known printed and manuscript works. Authors varied from quasi-mythical ones to such outstanding figures as Giovanni Francesco Abela, Filippo Cagliola and Carlo Micallef.⁴⁵ The work was inspired by contemporary European models, particularly by Antonio Mongitore's *Biblioteca sicula*. Mifsud is known to have initiated work on his *opus magnum* since at least the early 1750s.⁴⁶ The project was planned to consist of two parts, with the first one covering the period down to 1650 and the second from that year onwards. Although only the first part was even published, work on the second is known to have been undertaken since at least 1755,⁴⁷ thus being possibly completed by the time of the author's death. In late 1756 Mifsud presented a manuscript copy of the completed first part to Bishop Alpheran.⁴⁸ Even following the setting up of the Maltese press, Mifsud had intended to have the first part printed in Florence.⁴⁹ Patriotic considerations, however, seem to have played a part in making Mifsud opt for *Biblioteca maltese*'s printing in Malta.⁵⁰

The significance of *Biblioteca maltese* goes well beyond its certainly crucial role of highlighting and of preserving for posterity the memory of Maltese literary achievements. The work has indeed to be viewed within the overall context of a string of publications by contemporary Maltese authors, having a

⁴⁵ The original manuscript text of the first volume of Filippo Cagliola's work on the Inquisition, entitled *De Sacra Orthodoxæ Fidei Inquisitorum Apostolica Potestate*, has recently been discovered by the present author in the *Archivio Storico della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede*, formerly belonging to the Roman Inquisition, in Rome (Vol. St. St. D1-a ; see illustration 8). The volume consists of over 1300 folio-sized pages and was written between 1646 and 1650, partly in Malta and partly in Palermo, as is indicated on most quires. Mifsud (*Biblioteca maltese*, p. 221) gives the title of this work as *Catholica pugna Inquisitorum Apostolicor.*, and lists it amongst the lost works of Maltese letterati.

⁴⁶ NLM Lib. Ms. 1029, unfol., *lettera IIIª*, Reboul to Mifsud, 11 March 1752, "in questo mese anche viddi l'opera intitolata *Biblioteca Melitense* del Dr. D. Saverio Mifsud, avvocato di nostra Città Valletta, la sta facendo con grandi notizie, e molto curiosa".

⁴⁷ NLM Lib. Ms. 142/3, f. 56v, Mifsud to De Soldanis, 26 March 1755, "... per potermi affaticare a compilare la seconda parte della mia Istoria, essendo già uscita dalle mani la prima parte sotto titolo di *Biblioteca maltese*".

⁴⁸ NLM Lib. Ms. 12, p. 83, 26.8.1756.

⁴⁹ NLM Lib. Ms. 13, pp. 48, 68, "... da stamparsi in Firenze".

⁵⁰ *Biblioteca maltese*, dedication, "dopo che la beneficenza del nostro magnanimo, e incomparabile Principe il Serenissimo Gran Maestro à eretta la Stamperia in Malta, io non ho potuto più raffrenare il desiderio da me avuto più volte di dare alla luce una Storia de' nostri Scrittori sotto il titolo di *Biblioteca Maltese*, parendomi che niuna Opera potesse più appartenere ai Torchi di questa famosa, e rispettabilissima Isola".

FRATRIS.

PHILIPPI CAGLIOLÆ

Melitenfis Franciscani Conuent.

*S. Theologia Doctoris, & in Melitana
Sanctissima Inquisitione
Consultoris.*

De

*Sacra Orthodoxæ Fidei Inquisitorum
Apostolica Potestate.*

TOMVS PRIOR.

*In quo de Causis Efficiente, & Materiali.
scilicet*

*De Origine, & Auctoritate Inquisitorum,
&*

*De Causis ad eos pertinentibus digeritur.
Controuersia Scholastica,
& Morales, iuxta Scoti
Doctrinam, cum Catholicis.*

*Et Dogmatica, ex Concilijs, Sanctis Patribus,
ac Summorum Pontificum Canonicis
Sanctionibus, Ex Verbo Dei scripto,
& tradito cum Hæreticis
propugnantur.*

fundamental role in the development of Maltese national consciousness. In contrast with their seventeenth-century predecessors, Mifsud and his contemporaries concentrated upon Maltese issues. Thus Maltese history, language, Catholic origin, biography and bibliography all received due attention after more than a century of almost total neglect. Indeed, following Giovanni Francesco Abela's *Della descrizione di Malta* (Malta, 1647), Maltese authors had focussed their interests on such non-Maltese topics as theology, medicine, geography and particularly upon matters pertaining to the Order. This crucial shift of attention from non-Maltese to Maltese areas of interest may be attributed to a large extent to an increased national awareness, brought about by familiarisation with similar tendencies on the Continent. Locally this resulted in a conscious effort to emphasise Maltese national identity and culture in the face of dominance and often derision by foreigners in general and by the Island's aristocratic European overlords in particular. Irrespective of the subject treated, eighteenth-century Maltese authors provided their readers with safe, non-politically compromising eulogies of the glories of the Island's past with a constant underlying current referring to Malta's Europeaness. With such weapons it was hoped to eradicate the long-standing taunt of Malta as belonging to infidel and barbaric Africa rather than to Christian and civilised Europe.⁵¹ Giuseppe Testaferrata's praise for Mifsud's bibliography is worth quoting in this context : *"in vero si porranno silenzio con tale opera che Ella pubblica, quei molti che, o per ignoranza, o per sdegno, stimano la nostra isola un inutile e barbaro scoglio tra le onde dell'Africa"*.⁵²

The printing of *Biblioteca maltese* was to result in a serious conflict between Mifsud and the printer Capaci, marring their erstwhile cordial relations. The dispute, centering around shortcomings on the printer's part, was brought before the local Inquisitorial Tribunal in view of Mifsud's status. Mifsud had instructed Capaci to have two copies of the two hundred and sixty-five printed which he intended to present to Cardinal Rezzonico and to the Grand Master, printed on more expensive paper. The press staff however, jumbled Mifsud's request.⁵³ While Mifsud's work certainly appealed to the restricted Maltese cultured elite, many of the two hundred and sixty-five copies printed seem to have remained unsold. In 1783 Baron Gaetano Pisani reported that most of the copies had ended up being sold by weight as wrapping paper.⁵⁴ The sad fate of

⁵¹ Such an attitude is discernible throughout the period of the Order's rule over Malta, see for instance Quintin's description of Malta (1536) and Rogadeo's onslaught on everything Maltese (1780).

⁵² NLM Misc. 245/14, Testaferrata to Mifsud, 22 May 1757.

⁵³ AIM *Acta Civilia*, Vol. 537, ff. 30-37v.

⁵⁴ Gaetano Pisani, *Lettera di un maltese ad un cavaliere gerosolimitano professore residente in Napoli su i cinque ragionamente del cavaliere Giandonato Rogadeo* (Vercelli, 1783), p. 34,

Biblioteca maltese reflected in the most clear manner the limitations of the local cultured class having an interest in things Maltese.

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

Apart from his *Biblioteca maltese*, Mifsud's lifelong dedication to learning resulted in his amassing of a considerable collection of manuscript material, much of which eventually found its way to the *Biblioteca Pubblica* at an unknown time and under unknown circumstances. The acquisition of the material by the public library ensured its survival, contrary to what seems to have been the fate of most material belonging to other Maltese *letterati*. Even Mifsud's collection was clearly not acquired in its entirety, with perhaps the most valuable loss being that of the second part of *Biblioteca maltese* which Mifsud had worked upon, if not completed, by the time of his death.⁵⁵ What the library did acquire was Mifsud's *stromata* collection. Originally, this collection comprised volumes containing manuscript or printed material or a mixture of both. Following its acquisition by the public library, twenty-four *stromata* volumes containing almost exclusively manuscript material were classified as the first twenty-four volumes of the library's miscellaneous manuscript collection. In the process of doing this, Mifsud's original arrangement was disrupted: Thus, for instance, what became Library Manuscript 1 was originally *Stromatum XV*, dated 1760, while Library Manuscript 2 consists of *Stromatum XIV*, dated 1759. Library Manuscript 20 was *Stromatum VI*, dated 1755! Besides these twenty-four volumes, the other ones, originally also part of the *stromata* collection, but which contained predominantly, though not exclusively, printed material, found themselves separated and organised within the library's *miscellanea* collection.⁵⁶

The twenty-four quarto-sized manuscript volumes comprise what often seems to be an inexhaustible richness of documentation, covering practically every subject. The material was arranged in order of its acquisition, and each volume had a list of contents compiled at the end. Practically all volumes contain a title-page in Mifsud's own handwriting, enumerating the volume, giving its year of compilation and also bearing a dedication to some notable personality. The volumes were described in certain detail by librarian Cesare Vassallo in his

"avendolo noi stessi tanto conosciuto che quasi tutti gli esemplari furono venduti in Malta stessa a peso di carta per involversi il pepe".

⁵⁵ See footnote 47 above.

⁵⁶ Important examples of this are NLM Misc. 243, formerly *Stromatum XI* (1759) ; 245, formerly *Stromatum XXIII* (1765) ; and 250, formerly *Stromatum X* (1756).

Giornale Maltese
 Del Dottor Ign: Jav: Krispid
 Dall'anno del sign.

1753.

fino l'anno di nostra salute

1755. inclusiv.

Con una esatta descrizione d'orti
 Li accidenti e notizie, e voci
 popolari, occorpi e spage
 in Malta in diverse

anni.

catalogue of the library's manuscripts, dated 1856.⁵⁷ Vassallo's description, however, falls short from doing justice to the collection. His description at times either provides insufficient information or else completely omits any reference to particular material. Thus, the description of the *intermezzo* of *Abate Boccadifuoco* in Library Manuscript 1 does not state that the *intermezzo* referred to the corrupt Italian used by Maltese women and contains words in Maltese.⁵⁸ For the same volume, Vassallo leaves out completely any reference to the poetical work celebrating the setting up of a *tonnara* in Malta in 1760.⁵⁹

The material consists of a collection of original and copied documentation spanning the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries.⁶⁰ Mifsud evidently had a variety of original sources at his disposal, not least being the Inquisitorial archive from which he copied material deemed of particular relevance. He for instance has provided copies of the documentation relating to the establishment of the Maltese seventeenth-century press, the originals of which are still to be found within the Inquisitorial archive.⁶¹ Mifsud similarly utilised privately-owned material, such as manuscript works of Gerolamo Manduca.⁶² The latter practice has proved all the more valuable since much of the original private documentation utilised has long since been lost.

Of Mifsud's own writings within the collection, his diaries are by far the most important, indeed they constitute one of the major primary sources for a social history of eighteenth-century Malta.⁶³ They cover the periods 1 January 1740 to 13 June 1741, 26 April to 4 June 1746 and then continuously from 1 January 1753 to 25 December 1765. The idea of keeping a *giornale maltese* in which local events were recorded was inspired by foreign and local precedents.⁶⁴ The lack of a local journalistic literature, recording current events as they occurred

⁵⁷ Cesare Vassallo, *Catalogo dei codici e dei manoscritti inediti che si conservano nella Pubblica Biblioteca di Malta*, (Malta, 1856), pp. 9-31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9, "prima parte di un intermezzo per musica dell'abate Boccadifuoco". Mifsud's own description of the work states, "intermezzo in cui la forza consiste nella maniera con la quale si discorre in lingua italiana corrotta. Composto dall'abate Boccadifuoco, palermitano, il quale portatosi in Malta per essere ricevuto Fra Cappellano Conventuale, ed osservata la maniera con la quale parlano corrottamente le donne maltesi in italiano compone il presente intermezzo, che restò molto accetto, e di gusto universale".

⁵⁹ NLM Lib. Ms. 1, pp. 63-64, "in occasione della prima leva della Tonnara in Malta nel 1760".

⁶⁰ Eg. NLM Lib. Ms. 23, copy of privilege granted to Chicco Gatto by the King of Sicily in 1350.

⁶¹ Eg. NLM Lib. Ms. 17, p. 120, letter of Cardinal Barberini to Inquisitor Gori, dated 11 June 1644, original in AIM *Corrispondenza* 8, f. 107.

⁶² NLM Lib. Ms. 2, pp. 526-562, *Memorie tradizionali cavate dai manoscritti del Padre Manduca*.

⁶³ For a recent in-depth analysis of Mifsud's diaries, see S. Zammit (1996), esp. pp. 30-180.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-154.

may have further motivated Mifsud to take up the task. Contrary to such contemporary models as Reboul's *giornale*, Mifsud also included personal affairs in his diaries. This he did, as he himself stated, so as to avoid having to keep a separate journal recording his private affairs.⁶⁵ The resulting mixture of public and private news, often elaborated by personal observation and opinion, provides not merely dry albeit mostly otherwise unknown facts, but also a Maltese *letterato's* interaction with them. Apart from his diaries, Mifsud's personal contributions to the *stromata* include material written in Maltese and hence of particular significance from the linguistic aspect.⁶⁶ Library Manuscript 1 contains a panegiric on the Transfiguration, delivered by Mifsud at Lija, on 6 August 1754.⁶⁷ Library Manuscript 48 similarly contains a number of Mifsud's Maltese sermons.⁶⁸

I consider it most appropriate to close this lecture by appealing for a greater awareness of the need to preserve and to make known Malta's rich literary heritage. Less adaptable than our impressive monuments as a money-making relic of the past, yet often more fundamental for our understanding of such a past, the survival of our written heritage is daily threatened by neglect and misuse. It would indeed be ironic that such material as has survived the vicissitudes of centuries be irretrievably lost in the age of the information superhighway. The publication of an annotated edition of Mifsud's diaries, admittedly requiring a considerable commitment of resources, would not only make such a treasure widely available, but would moreover save it for posterity, since the original volumes cannot indefinitely withstand the repeated handling and photocopying to which they are subjected. Perhaps some culturally conscious institution, academic or otherwise, may be identified which would be ready to have its name attached to such an undertaking rather than to flimsier ones of dubious long-term value.

⁶⁵ NLM Lib. Ms. 12, p. 302. "lo scrittore de' presenti giornali per non fare diversi registri secondo le materie che gli occorreano precisamente di esazioni, esiti e spese, stipolazioni d'istromenti pubblici, compre, vendite, ed altro, essendo simili notamenti molto necessarii, stimò bene in questi futuri giornali notare non solo le notizie delle novità pubbliche ma anche i proprii negozii per potere in un solo libretto trovare nelle opportunità le notizie, che gl' saran necessarie, siccome parimente saranno qui notate varie altre".

⁶⁶ See Joseph Cassar Pullicino, "Priedki bil-Malti ta' I.S. Mifsud", *Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti* (Malta, 1962), pp. 22-34; Joseph Zammit Ciantar, "Malti tas-seklu tmintax", *Hyphen: a journal of melitensia and the humanities*, Vol. IV, no. 5 (1985), pp. 178-206.

⁶⁷ NLM Lib. Ms. 1, pp. 456-471, *Il Simbolo della Verità della Legge Evangelica, Panegirico Sacro in lode della Gloriosa Transfigurazione di N.S.G.C. rappresentato in idioma maltese nella parrocchiale chiesa di Casal Lia li 6 agosto, giorno di martedì dalle ore 9 alle 10 di mattino del 1754.*

⁶⁸ NLM Lib. Ms. 48, *Discorsi e Panegirici Sacri - Morali composti e rappresentati in Malta in varie occasioni e contingenze dal Sacerdote Ignazio Saverio Mifsud...*

Transfigurazione di S. S. Perù Siro.

43

Levit in signum, et in testimonium. Isaig 19.

1. Stedintni o Loppulu divot, fiesc iena icolli l'unus
vidher dalhodo fue iedan il Pulpitu, gena iedina
il Basilica, fedae l'istessu smien li Inti tipote-
nizza p' feth d'bir, u pompa ecda Nobili il Dorin-
sa Transfigurazioni ta Sidna Perù.

2. Jena Nistiedec o Loppulu mathub t' Alla Gie-
icolloc icciorti, li tinsay present, almeno vil con-
siderazioni, u tara visioni d'bir, u spettacolo
mystediu grimmu, li eff, eta mia, u tnein, u ho-
sein sena in circa illu. d'her u sav f'certa scila
ta scitua, u publicat imbanat mill' Agostoli sena
seua pthal giuvvata incappa ta luno.

3. Ma nasse pero inhit, liema ia l'actas o icciorti
t'ha, li tara visioni ecda misteriosa. o l'unus
li iena nistcar li niscieri, billi vidher fedari
illoc: Menti Jena, billi nara li stitulu ta
iedina il Basilica ua J Transfigurazioni gloriu-
sivima ta Sidna Perù, hic est Petrus monu-
menti, incun costrit incuandao, li inti o Loppulu
tinsay il Loppulu Pand mathub t' Alla Loppulu
Domini iste est: iec mianee idhivi li Perù ihit
appuntu pthal ma cal d'arbo. Alla il hary t'm-
fierec li Aronne mil Loppulu Leviticu. Ego lav,
et hyetatis tua in medio filiorum Israel.

LETTERA

SOPRA LA FONDAZIONE, ED ESISTENZA

*Della Chiesa, e Convento de' RR. Padri
Cappuccini del Gozo di Malta,*

SCRITTA DAL CANONICO DOTTOR

FRANCESCO AGIUS

DE SOLDANIS,

DIRETTA

Al Sacerdote

D.IGNAZIO SAVERIO

MIFSUD

DELLA CITTA' VALLETTA:

Avvocato, e Consultore del S. Ufficio



In Malta, nel Palazzo e Stamperia di S. A. S. 1759.
Per il Capaci suo Stampatore.)(*Con Lic. de' Sup.*

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Chronologicam seriem continens / DIGNITATUM, & CANONICORUM / Trium
Insignium / COLLEGIATARUM, / QUÆ / In Melitæ, & Gaulos Insulis / Sanctæ
Apostolicæ Sedis beneficentia / Erectæ, / Maximo Divini Nominis incremento /
existunt. / Additis Inscriptionibus, ac Epitaphiis / in iisdem Ecclesiis / insculptis.
[Malta, 1757]

Sedicesimo, 151 p. B-I, K-M, M⁴-P⁴, Q
AOM 2038, f. 12v, n. 8, 29.1.1757 ; f. 15, n. 23, 24.3.1757

RAGGUAGLIO / DEGLI / SPAVENTEVOLI / ACCIDENTI / OCCORSI IN
QUEST' ISOLA DI / MALTA / Li 29. Ottobre, e 5 Novembre MDCCLVII. /
Minutamente descritti, e dati a luce con le dovute osservazioni, / proposte a
Signori Filosofi, ed Eruditissimi Naturalisti, / per scrutinarne di esse la vera causa.
/ In Malta, nel Palazzo, e Stamperia di S.A.S. MDCCLVII. / Per D. Niccolò
Capaci suo Stampatore.) (Con Licenza de' Superiori.

Octavo, 10 p. A₂, A₃
AOM 2038, f. 23rv, n. 64, 25.11.1757 ; NLM Lib. Ms. 12, pp. 273-274
On page 10 : *Ossequiosissimo Servitore N.N.* The work, however, is known to
have been composed by Mifsud

BIBLIOTECA / MALTESE / DELL'AVVOCATO MIFSUD / PARTE PRIMA, /
Che contiene l'Istoria Cronologica, e le / notizie della Persona, e delle Opere /
degli Scrittori nati in Malta, e Gozo / sino all'anno 1650. / CONSECRATA /
ALL'EMINENTISSIMO, e REVERENDISSIMO PRINCIPE / IL SIGNOR
CARDINALE / CARLO / REZZONICO / Camerlengo di Santa Chiesa, /
Secretario de' Memoriali, / e Nipote della Santità / di Nostro Signore /
CLEMENTE PP. XIII. / Felicemente Regnante. / In Malta nel Palazzo, e
Stamperia di S.A.S. 1764. / Per D. Niccolò Capaci suo Stampatore,) (Con Lic. de'
Sup.

Folio, [26], xxiv, 473 p., 2 leaves of plates, ††-††††, A-Z², Aa -Zz², Aaa-Iii²
AOM 2048, f. 8, n. 37, undated [1767]

2. Works left unpublished at the National Library of Malta

NLM Lib. Mss. 1 to 24, known as *Stromata*, containing a vast miscellany of material. This comprises original writings by Mifsud as well as those of others, copies of documents and printed matter.⁶⁹ A description of the contents of the *Stromata* collection was published by Cesare Vassallo in his *Catalogo dei Codici e dei Manoscritti inediti che si conservano nella Pubblica Biblioteca di Malta* (Malta 1856, pp. 9-31). The following volumes contain Mifsud's diaries:

Lib. Ms. 9, pp. 160-488	1 January 1740 to 13 June 1741
Lib. Ms. 1, pp. 338-455	26 April to 4 June 1746
Lib. Ms. 11, pp. 222-663	1 January 1753 to 31 December 1755
Lib. Ms. 12, pp. 1-643	1 January 1756 to 31 December 1758
Lib. Ms. 13, pp. 1-910	1 January 1759 to 31 December 1762
Lib. Ms. 14, pp. 1-527	1 January 1763 to 25 December 1765

Lib. Ms. 48, *Discorsi, e panegirici Sacro-Morali composti, e rappresentati in Malta in varie occasioni, e contingenze dal sacerdote Ignazio Saverio Mifsud, maltese, e dall'istesso dedicati, e consecrati alla pia e venerabile e santa memoria del giovine Gaetano Fortunato Mifsud, fratello predefonto dell'autore, MDCCLII*
Mostly written in Maltese

NLM *Miscellanea*, Vols. 243, 245 and 250, originally forming part of Mifsud's *Stromata* collection, but mostly containing printed works, with some manuscript material.

3. Works presumed lost

Biblioteca maltese parte seconda

4. Related material

(i) Manuscript material

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NLM Misc. 442/2, *Nomina del rev. Don Ignazio Saverio Mifsud alla dignità di Protonotario*

⁶⁹ For partial publications of Mifsud's *Stromata* see below.

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Mifsud Bonnici, Robert - *Dizzjunarju bijo-biblijografiku nazzjonali*. - Malta : Dipartiment ta' l-Informazzjoni, 1960, pp. 347-348.

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